

BATON ROUGE

"Pilot"

written by

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BATON ROUGE: PILOT

EXT. MAIN STREET - BATON ROUGE, LOUISIANA - DAY (1992)

Shimmering heat rises off the pavement. The aroma of smokers stacked with ribs fills the air as VOLUNTEERS drape red, white & blue bunting and balloons across the town square.

SUPER: JULY 4, 1992

A car cruises down Main Street, the radio blaring Tom Cochrane's LIFE IS A HIGHWAY.

TOM COCHRANE (ON RADIO)
Life's like a road that you travel
on, there's one day here and the
next day gone. Sometimes you bend
and sometimes you stand, sometimes
you turn your back to the wind --

Suddenly there's a rapid-fire BOOM...BOOM...BOOM. Pedestrians freeze. A POLICE OFFICER on patrol drives down the block, pulling around the high school as more EXPLOSIONS sound.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL - FOOTBALL FIELD - CONTINUOUS

Behind the fieldhouse, LUKE (14, skinny, guileless) anxiously watches NICK (16, muscular, fearless) ignite FIREWORKS.

TOM COCHRANE (RECORDING)
Life is a highway, I wanna ride it
all night long...

Seeing the police car, the boys TAKE OFF. The chorus grows louder as the teenagers run down the field.

TOM COCHRANE (RECORDING) (CONT'D)
If you're going my way, I wanna
drive it all night long...

The cruiser gives pursuit, speeding down the dirt path that borders the field. As it gains on them, Luke nervously glances back. He stumbles and FALLS.

Nick turns, sees Luke down but continues on, leaving him.

Luke's sure he's screwed as the cruiser closes in. But the cop car hits a MUDDY stretch and gets mired in the dirt. Scrambling to his feet, Luke races away.

EXT/INT. 7-ELEVEN CONVENIENCE STORE - CONTINUOUS

Emerging from a narrow alley, Luke lands outside a 7-Eleven. He runs inside, activating a BELL overhead.

He leans against the wall, breathing hard. He sees Nick near the register, talking to some GIRLS.

But as Luke steps toward him, the bell RINGS again and --

A uniformed COP (late 30's) enters, pausing to wipe his arm across his sweaty brow.

Luke turns to look for Nick -- but he's fled down the aisle past a LOUISIANA LOTTO sign.

COP

You better have a damn good explanation.

Luke waits, ready for his punishment. But then --

COP (CONT'D)

Your mom's been looking all over for you, Luke. She's got a bushel of corn waiting to be shucked.

Relief washes over Luke as the cop -- his father DANIEL -- steps past him and crosses to the counter.

DANIEL

Hey Joe. We'll take five today.

The CASHIER rings up his Lotto tickets. Luke fills them out.

LUKE

Dad, if we win, can we get one of those McLarens?

DANIEL

Jackpot's only two million. Why spend half of it on a car?

(beat)

Dispatcher said some kids had firecrackers over at the field. Know anything about that?

Luke glances down the aisle and sees Nick, who holds his gaze with a steely look. Don't say a word.

The bell RINGS again as a MAN enters, his face hidden by a hooded sweatshirt. His radar up, Daniel turns from the coffee machine, HIS HAND MOVING TO HIS HOLSTER.

Flowers surround a framed 8x10 of Daniel in his police uniform. We hear snippets of conversation.

MOURNER #1

Such a shame.

MOURNER #2 (O.S.)

Ruthless thug.

MOURNER #3 (O.S.)

Doesn't make sense. He didn't even take the money in the register.

INT. SUBURBAN HOME - LUKE'S BEDROOM - SAME

The hum of voices floats back to Luke's bedroom where he sits on the floor, clutching his father's badge.

The door creaks open. His neck still bandaged, Luke sinks behind the bed. Nick enters and rummages through coats, pilfering anything of value. As he pulls CASH from a wallet --

LUKE

Put it back.

Nick peers over the bed.

NICK

What are you doin'? Hiding?

He laughs and continues rifling through guests' belongings.

LUKE

(rising)

I said put it back.

NICK

Who's gonna make me? You?

Eyes blazing, Luke lunges and TACKLES Nick to the floor. But he's no match for the taller, muscular Nick, who PUMMELS him.

WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

Nick? Nick honey?

Nick gets up, straightening his shirt as he crosses to the door. He looks back at Luke and shakes his head.

NICK

I don't get you. You're the son of a cop. You knew this could happen.

(beat; shrugs)

'Least you can say he died a hero.

Luke remains, his lip bleeding. As he picks up the badge --

MATCH CUT TO:

LUKE, now 39. His once-spindly frame is solid and ripped, his gaze intense and focused. He's no longer a lightweight chump. Now he's someone you'd cross the street to avoid.

For a moment his eyes grow soft, and we see a glimpse of that vulnerable boy as he stares at the badge in his hand.

But his eyes grow dark when he hears a METAL CLANG. As he stuffs the badge into a duffel, pull back to reveal --

INT. LOUISIANA STATE PENITENTIARY - CONTINUOUS

Luke's in his cell, packing up. A GUARD waits at the door.

GUARD

Time to go.

Luke slowly nods. Strangely apprehensive at the prospect.

EXT/INT. BATON ROUGE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - AUDITORIUM - DAY

There's an assembly going on, the seats filled with young students and their parents as EMMA (9) stands onstage.

Behind her is a large printed banner that reads D.A.R.E.: Drug Abuse Resistance Education. Smaller, handmade signs read "Dare to Think For Yourself" and "Dare to Dream Big".

EMMA

Drugs destroy lives. That's why I pledge to stay away from them, and to make sure my friends and family do, too.

As the audience applauds, Emma looks out at her father, Deputy Sheriff NICK DUVALLE (now 42) and mother ANDREA (28, doll-like) who beam with pride.

The PRINCIPAL steps forward and takes the mic.

PRINCIPAL

That was wonderful, Emma. I'd like to thank all the students and their parents for their commitment. And special thanks to Chief Deputy Nick DuValle and his lovely wife Andrea for raising the funds to ensure this program continues!

The Principal waves for Nick and Andrea to take the stage. The audience seconds that with more applause.

Nick carries himself like a rock star, and the town treats him like one. He takes the mic, hands raised in humility.

NICK

I'm just happy to be a part of this program. Let's face it, it's all about the kids. They're the ones who deserve the praise. To the future of this fine city!

The audience cheers as Emma and Andrea wrap their arms around Nick. Devoted dad, loving husband, brave enforcer of the law.

INT. BATON ROUGE HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

SHAY (15) leans against a row of lockers as students return from lunch. This girl has the face and body every teen wants.

ZOEY (14) is the exact opposite. Unsophisticated and self-conscious, she fumbles to open her locker.

A bell RINGS. As students begin to leave, Zoey pulls harder.

SHAY

Zoey, calm down.

Shay gives the lock a tug. It opens.

SHAY (CONT'D)

He's getting out today, isn't he?

Zoey's eyes well as she nods. Shay puts an arm around her.

SHAY (CONT'D)

It's gonna be okay, Zoe.

Zoey stares back at her. Shay's confidence is usually enough to convince her. But this time, she's not so sure.

EXT. LOUISIANA STATE PENITENTIARY - DAY

Luke emerges from the gates and sees his sister MOLLY (40's, world-weary) leaning against her car in nursing scrubs with a nametag that reads "Molly James".

Luke gives her a quick hug. She pulls him back for another. They break and she waits until he surrenders a small smile.

LUKE
Thanks for coming, Moll.

INT. MOLLY'S CAR - TRAVELING - DAY

Luke is quiet as they drive past roadside farmstands. Molly jabbars on, trying to fill the silence.

MOLLY
I figured he'd move out by now. I mean, he's not a kid anymore and he's got a good job. Not that I want him to go. Ever since his dad left, it's been just the two of us. Mom says we're like an old married couple. God, that sounds creepy. You'll understand someday.
(beat; still nothing)
I can't believe Jackson's almost sixteen. It goes by so fast --

She stops, remembering where he's been.

LUKE
How are they, Molly?

MOLLY
Fine.
(off his look)
Luke, they're fine.

LUKE
I haven't seen them in five months.

MOLLY
You can't blame Charlotte for that. Things got busy. School, sports...

But he knows better so she stops pretending.

MOLLY (CONT'D)
I don't know why they stopped coming. A lot can happen in a year.
(smiles)
For what it's worth, Ruby's been bouncing off the walls, she's so excited to have you home.

LUKE
What about the Sheriff? He excited to have me back?

MOLLY
Leave it alone, Luke.

LUKE
It's not that easy.

MOLLY
He already got you thrown into
prison. Sending you back will only
help his chance for re-election.

LUKE
I'm not afraid of Nick.

She pulls to the side of the road, puts the car in park.

MOLLY
Luke, this is your chance to make
it up to Charlotte and the kids, to
put things right.
(beat)
I love you, baby brother. But you
blow this and I'm done. You won't
have anyone in your corner.

EXT/INT. BATON ROUGE SHERIFF'S OFFICE - DAY

A typical parish office. Civilians file reports as uniformed
deputies process arrests.

In the locker room, three deputies finish dressing and grab
their gear. DELANEY is the ringleader, MATTSON his cohort.
Babyfaced BOGGS is a rookie, not as jaded as the other two.

DELANEY
I give him a month.

MATTSON
A month? He just got out.

DELANEY
Some of these guys, once they've
been inside, that's all it takes.

BOGGS
A friend of mine said those drug
charges were bogus.

MATTSON
Luke was guilty. They found his
stash in a storage locker.

BOGGS

But why would he do it, after what happened to his father?

He superstitiously makes the sign of the cross.

DELANEY

Luke's old man was as dirty as they come. He was probably in business with the dealer who shot him.

MATTSON

They only say he's a hero 'cause he died in the line.

(to Delaney)

Just like Frank Ducharme, huh? He died doing what he loved most. Screwing hookers.

Boggs looks confused. Delaney grins.

DELANEY

We had to carry Frank's body out of the motel and wedge him behind the wheel of his patrol car so his wife could find him there.

MATTSON

Only problem was, we forgot to wipe the lipstick off his cock.

Laughing, they emerge from the locker room as Nick and ZACH (22, brawny but not very smart) enter. Delaney smiles, tries to act casual.

DELANEY

Hey boss.

NICK

Your shift started ten minutes ago.

DELANEY

We'll make it up on the back end.

NICK

That's okay. You can all help me out at Green Acres this weekend.

Delaney nods, not happy at giving up his day off.

INT. SHERIFF'S CRUISER - TRAVELING - DAY

Nick and Zach head down a sparsely populated county road.

ZACH

So Green Acres is all yours?

NICK

Half mine. Twenty years ago Louisiana was so desperate for new facilities, they opened up the bidding. With one condition: companies had to partner with a local sheriff so the county could share the revenue. Faster than green grass through a goose, every contractor came a'courtin'.

They turn onto a gated road leading to --

EXT. EAST BATON ROUGE CORRECTIONAL FACILITY - CONTINUOUS

Aka Green Acres, for-profit prison facility whose inmates provide landscaping services throughout the county.

Nick and Zach drive up as INMATES exit a bus just back from work detail, wearing jumpsuits caked with dirt and grass.

ZACH

Do they go out every day?

NICK

Rain or shine.

(off his look)

It's good for 'em, Zach. Work programs build character. And benefit the community.

ZACH

They let you do whatever you want?

NICK

Can't have a society without prisons. Shouldn't they be run by people who know what they're doing?

The inmates file past LYLE, an assistant warden, who checks them off before they head for the outdoor showers.

Lyle nods hello to Nick and hands him an envelope.

LYLE

Just finished the new lawn over at First Baptist. Pastor John appreciates the rush job. They've got a wedding this weekend.

Nick smiles and shrugs.

NICK
I'm all about the love.

INT. GREEN ACRES PRISON - DAY

They enter an office where PORTER (17) is focused on his computer. He doesn't look up as Nick heads for his desk. Zach waits awkwardly, glancing around the office.

ZACH
Hey, how's it going, bro?
(off his silence)
Yo, the boss man's here. Might
wanna quit the video game.

PORTER
(without looking up)
Who's the clown with the badge?

NICK
Porter. Play nice. This is my
trainee, Zach.

PORTER
(to Zach)
It's not a video game. I'm
designing an algorithm.
(speaking slowly)
That's when you program a number of
steps to make the magic computer
solve a math-em-a-ti-cal problem.

Zach bristles at the disrespect, but he's curious.

ZACH
What kind of problem?

Porter gestures to a map on the wall. Colored flags locate prisons throughout the state.

PORTER
How can Green Acres achieve optimal
efficiency?

Nick smiles like a proud papa.

NICK
Porter knows the crime rates for
every parish as well as felony
rankings and average sentence.
(MORE)

NICK (CONT'D)

Then he takes the operating budget for each prison, compares that to the cost of inmate upkeep --

PORTER

And abracadabra, we can determine where to allocate our resources. Basic economics, bro.

(returns to work)

The warden up in Richland called. He's got four beds to fill by the end of the month.

INT. SHERIFF'S CRUISER - TRAVELING

As they drive away, Zach looks back at the massive compound patrolled by guards on horseback.

NICK

Porter was a runner for Holt Granger, the biggest supplier in the parish. Seemed a shame to waste a mind like that, so the D.A. and I worked out a little deal.

He scans a spread-sheet from Porter.

NICK (CONT'D)

Starting tomorrow we focus on felony arrests. Anything with a mandatory sentence.

(off Zach's look)

It's not like I tell 'em to break the law. And those beds in Richland aren't going to fill themselves.

EXT./INT. LUKE & CHARLOTTE'S HOUSE - EVENING

The house is simple but welcoming. A tire swing hangs from a sprawling southern oak and pink begonias bloom in the yard.

Freshly showered, Luke nervously runs his hand through his hair as he carries his bag up the walk. From inside he hears--

RUBY (O.S.)

He's here! He's here!

The door is thrown open by RUBY (8), a sweet-faced child glowing with excitement.

RUBY (CONT'D)

Daddy!

She jumps into his arms. Luke is momentarily overcome. He holds her close, her energy filling him with new life.

Luke's wife CHARLOTTE appears (mid-30's, a natural beauty). Charlotte's warm and unaffected, but we sense the stress she's under, trying to pretend this is a normal evening.

CHARLOTTE

She's been watching for you for
over an hour.

With Ruby still clinging to him, all Luke can do is lean in and give Charlotte a soft kiss, tenderly touching her cheek. He sniffs the air.

LUKE

You brought crawfish and biscuits
from the restaurant.

CHARLOTTE

And fresh gumbo. Dad says hi.

LUKE

No he doesn't. The man hates me.

CHARLOTTE

He hates everyone. Don't think
you're special.

(beat)

Sorry I couldn't pick you up. The
hostess called in sick.

Zoey appears at the top of the stairs. Luke's eyes light up.

LUKE

Hi honey.

CHARLOTTE

Come give your dad a hug, Zoe.

Zoey tentatively descends the steps. But when Luke wraps her in his calming embrace, she closes her eyes and smiles.

ZOEY

I'm glad you're home.

LUKE

Me, too. Where's Jackson?

RUBY

He said he doesn't wanna see you.

CHARLOTTE

Ruby.

LUKE
That's all right.

CHARLOTTE
No, it's not.
(calling upstairs)
Jackson, come down for dinner.

She waits. No response. She look at Ruby, who caves.

RUBY
He went to Andrew's.

ZOEY
Ruby!

LUKE
It's okay.

CHARLOTTE
The hell it is. Zoey, why didn't
you tell me?

Grabbing her keys, she starts past, but Luke stops her.

LUKE
Charlotte. It's okay.

He looks back at Ruby and Zoey who watch him anxiously. Not the smoothest homecoming.

EXT/INT. NICK & ANDREA'S HOUSE - EVENING

A tree-lined street of gracious two-story homes with wrap-around porches and perfect lawns.

Emma sets the table as her half-sister Shay helps their grandmother CATHERINE (60) and Andrea fill the plates. Nick's at the counter, slicing barbecued tri tip.

SHAY
You said Dylan and I could spend
the summer with Mom.

NICK
I said maybe.

SHAY
She's been sober for two years --

CATHERINE
She's been sober before.

NICK
Grandma's right, honey. I've
learned not to trust it.

Andrea pauses to affectionately run her hand across Nick's
shoulders. She turns to Shay, speaking in honeyed tones --

ANDREA
Sweetie, if you and Dylan spend all
summer with your mom, what's poor
Emma gonna do?

SHAY
You don't care about Emma. You just
want a baby-sitter so you can go
clubbing with your friends.

Andrea reacts, making sure Nick sees how hurt she is.

NICK
Shay, don't take it out on your
stepmother just 'cause you're angry
with me. Andrea works hard to take
care of us. She's entitled to a
night out every now and then.

Shay stares at him. Every now and then? She turns to DYLAN
(16, entitled), who sits at the counter filching burnt ends.

SHAY
Dylan, don't you even care whether
we get to see Mom?

DYLAN
What difference does it make?

SHAY
You're a dick, you know that?

NICK
Shay, stop it. Dylan, go help Emma.

As Dylan moves away, Nick takes Shay aside. Gently --

NICK (CONT'D)
Honey, there are things you don't
understand about your mother.

Andrea leans in to Catherine, barely bothering to whisper.

ANDREA
That woman is so unstable, God only
knows what she's likely to do.

Nick sees Shay's eyes flare. But before she can respond --

NICK

Summer's still a ways off. We don't
have to decide anything just yet.

She nods, hopeful. But when they take their seats at the table, Shay's eyes narrow as she sees Andrea pat Nick's hand, unable to hide her delight at winning the battle.

INT. LUKE & CHARLOTTE'S HOUSE - RUBY'S ROOM - NIGHT

Squeezed onto the edge of a four-poster bed, Luke reads from *My Louisiana Sky*.

LUKE

"Some people are just afraid of
what's different. It doesn't mean
different is bad. It just means
different is different."

He looks down at Ruby, who's fast asleep. He kisses her forehead, drinking in her beauty. Then he tucks her in and moves for the door. As he steps into the hall --

INT. LUKE & CHARLOTTE'S HOUSE - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

-- JACKSON (16, lanky) is climbing the stairs, his backpack slung over his shoulder. Seeing his father, he freezes.

LUKE

Hey Jackson.

JACKSON

Hey.

Luke stares at him, stunned by how much he's changed. He takes a step toward him, but Jackson steps back.

LUKE

Mom left a plate for you in the
oven.

JACKSON

I ate at Drew's.

LUKE

Oh. How was school?

JACKSON

Okay.

There's a long beat as they face each other. Luke smiles.

LUKE

I can't get over how much you've --

JACKSON

I've got homework.

His indifference cuts like a knife. Luke tries to hide his disappointment.

LUKE

Okay. Don't stay up too late.

As Jackson moves past, he softly adds --

LUKE (CONT'D)

It's good to see you.

But Jackson doesn't look back.

EXT. STRIP CLUB - PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Zach is waiting in his beat-up Ford truck as OWEN (20's), drives up in a shiny silver Corvette.

Climbing out of the truck, Zach nods in appreciation.

ZACH

She's a beauty, Owen.

Owen hands an envelope to Zach. He peers at the cash inside --

ZACH (CONT'D)

I guess business is good.

OWEN

You're a goddamn guardian angel.

ZACH

Just steer clear of downtown or
Nick will be all over your ass.

A STRIPPER steps out of the club for a smoke. Seeing Zach --

STRIPPER

Hi handsome. You waiting for me?

He wasn't, but he smiles just the same.

ZACH

Sure am.

She crushes her cigarette and climbs into Zach's truck. Zach takes one last look at the Corvette.

ZACH (CONT'D)
Maybe it's time I got one myself.

OWEN
Wouldn't Nick have a problem with that?

Zach scoffs as he climbs into his truck.

ZACH
I've got Nick under control.

The stripper bends over his lap and disappears from view. Zach looks out at Owen and grins. Laughing, Owen drives away.

INT. LUKE & CHARLOTTE'S HOUSE - BATHROOM/BEDROOM - NIGHT

As the steam from the shower dissipates, Luke eyes his reflection in the mirror like he's staring at a stranger. He takes a deep breath, then steps into the bedroom --

-- where Charlotte is waiting, wearing a silk negligee.

CHARLOTTE
Lie down.
(off his hesitation)
When have you ever refused a backrub? Come on.

His abs are ripped, but when he lies on his stomach, Charlotte sees the YELLOWED BRUISES across his back.

She pauses, trying not to react as she climbs onto the bed and begins to knead his shoulders.

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)
I'm sorry about Jackson. You have to give him time.

Luke nods but stays silent.

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)
Did you really think things would fall into place that easily?

LUKE
Maybe if I'd seen them these past few months...

CHARLOTTE

Things got busy. And it's not like
I could force them to go.

Luke turns to face her, forcing her off his back.

LUKE

Which is it? They were too busy? Or
they didn't want to see me?

CHARLOTTE

You really want to talk about this
now?

LUKE

I think I have a right to know why
my own children --

CHARLOTTE

You think it was easy seeing you in
there? You think any kid wants to
visit his father in prison?

LUKE

Of course not, but --

CHARLOTTE

For months they drove up every
weekend and let some smirking guard
pat them down. Just so they could
sit across a table and pretend
there was no place they'd rather
be. 'Cause they love you that much.

LUKE

Charlotte --

CHARLOTTE

But Ruby kept having nightmares.
And Zoey started getting panic
attacks. So I decided they'd had
enough.

(beat)

You want to blame someone, blame
me. Because I couldn't keep --

Luke takes hold of her shoulders, stopping her.

LUKE

Charlotte, I'm sorry. I don't know
what I was thinking. I never should
have put you through --

His voice catches and she sees the pain in his eyes. She nods and rests her head against his chest.

He wraps his arms around her and they sit in silence, wondering if they can ever go back to the way things were.

INT. LUKE & CHARLOTTE'S BEDROOM - LATER

Charlotte sleeps. Luke stares out, sleep a long way off.

EXT. PRISON YARD - DAY (FLASHBACK)

[Note: Luke's flashbacks have a fragmented perspective; a series of stark images rather than a conventional scene.]

The sun beats down. INMATES run the track, lift weights.

SUPER: LOUISIANA STATE PENITENTIARY. ONE YEAR AGO.

A WARRIOR'S SHIELD on a bulging left bicep -- it belongs to IVAN, a beefy Serb on the bench-press.

The same TATTOO is on ALEK, lifting weights. An OLDER CON watches them, his face hidden in the shadows.

Luke enters the yard. Clean-shaven, cautious.

At the weights, the metal holds RATTLE as Alek drops the bar.

Ivan smiles. But the Older Con is no longer watching.

The younger cons follow his stare across the yard. To Luke.

The smart thing would be to keep his head down, blend in. Instead he looks right back at them.

INT. LUKE & CHARLOTTE'S KITCHEN - NIGHT (RESUME PRESENT)

Sitting at the counter, Luke searches "Goran Petrovic" on his laptop. He scrolls through the headlines:

-- "Serbian Mob Boss Indicted for Attempted Murder"

-- "D.A. Accuses Petrovic of Threatening Witnesses"

-- "Petrovic Convicted on Trafficking Charges"

A photo shows a Serbian man stepping out of a Lamborghini.

RUBY (O.S.)

Daddy!

In the throws of a bad dream, Ruby cries out for her father. Luke closes the laptop and heads upstairs.

INT. LUKE & CHARLOTTE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NEXT MORNING

Dressed in workout clothes, Charlotte bags lunches as Zoey and Ruby finish eating their cereal.

RUBY
Why can't Daddy take me to school?

CHARLOTTE
You kept him up late. Least we can do is let him sleep in.

She sees the laptop on the counter.

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)
Zoey, you know you're not allowed online before school.

ZOEY
Wasn't me.

CHARLOTTE
Go brush your teeth. We're going to be late.

As they head off, Charlotte looks at the computer. Opening it, she finds the search results page.

Confusion fills her eyes as she scrolls through one article after another chronicling the life of Goran Petrovic.

Charlotte looks up toward the bedroom where her husband sleeps. Why is he so interested in this man?

INT. COURTHOUSE - COURTROOM - DAY

A PUBLIC DEFENDER and her male CLIENT (30) face the JUDGE.

PUBLIC DEFENDER
We intend to show this accusation of sexual assault is baseless.

Nick enters and crosses to the ASSISTANT DISTRICT ATTORNEY.

PUBLIC DEFENDER (CONT'D)
It came the day after my client refused to promote the so-called victim, and only hours after he ended his relationship with her.

She turns, waiting for the ADA's response. But the ADA is too busy talking to Nick.

JUDGE

Chief Deputy DuValle. Always a pleasure.

NICK

How's it going, Judge?

JUDGE

Stock market's tanking, blood pressure's soaring, and my son just decided he'd rather be a girl.

NICK

But other than that, you're good?

The Judge smiles, reminded of why he's fond of Nick. The Public Defender sighs, seeing her chances dwindle.

PUBLIC DEFENDER

Your Honor...

JUDGE

Would the District Attorney's office care to weigh in on bail?

ADA

The defendant has a prior record of this kind of behavior --

PUBLIC DEFENDER

That was a statutory charge --

ADA

-- and we believe he's a danger to this community. We request he be remanded into custody until trial.

JUDGE

So ordered.

PUBLIC DEFENDER

Your Honor!

As the Public Defender protests, Nick exits with a smile.

EXT. MCDONALD'S - COUNTY ROADWAY - DAY

Deputies Delaney and Boggs drink coffee in their cruiser.

BOGGS

I don't see what the big deal is.

DELANEY

It's bad enough you took her to Chick-fil-A for her birthday. But then you pay with a coupon? My wife would've locked me outta the house.

An AFRICAN-AMERICAN COUPLE and their YOUNG CHILDREN exit the restaurant and drive off in an SUV with Mississippi plates.

Delaney nods to Boggs to follow. After a mile, he hits the siren. The SUV pulls to the shoulder. Boggs approaches the wife in the driver's seat, Delaney takes the passenger side.

BOGGS

License and registration.

The woman looks at her husband. As he reaches for the glove compartment, Delaney moves his hand to his holster.

WIFE

Registration's in the glove box.

The husband hands over the papers, nervously glancing at him.

HUSBAND

What's the problem, Sheriff?

DELANEY

You got tape over your left tail light.

WIFE

The cover's broken. We're waiting for a new one. Still works though.
(clicking the indicator)
See?

DELANEY

Have to write you up anyway.
(beat, sniffs)
You been smoking marijuana, ma'am?

WIFE

(shocked)
Of course not.

1ST CHILD

Mommy, what's going on?

Delaney nods to Boggs, who opens the driver's door --

BOGGS
Step out of the car, ma'am.

HUSBAND
Now wait a minute...

He opens his door and Delaney immediately SLAMS him up against the side of the car.

2ND CHILD
Daddy!

EXT. LOCAL HIGHWAY - MOMENTS LATER

The family huddles together on the dirt shoulder. Boggs stands over them, looking uneasy as Delaney searches their car. Inside the wife's purse, he finds a roll of CASH.

DELANEY
There's almost a thousand here. You buying or selling?

WIFE
We're on vacation. The air-b-n-b where we're staying doesn't take checks.

Delaney smirks. Sure they don't.

DELANEY
We can let the D.A. decide, in which case your kids will be sent to Child Protective Services. Or you can just sign the cash over to the county and be on your way.

The husband looks at his wife. Both furious at the shakedown, but reluctant to further traumatize their kids.

EXT. BATON ROUGE - NEIGHBORHOOD PARK - LATER

Charlotte runs along the edge of a park where MOTHERS gather to watch their KIDS play.

One of the moms sees Charlotte and says something to her friends, who turn to look.

Charlotte shakes off their stares and continues on. Up ahead she sees a DAD playing peek-a-boo with his BABY GIRL.

The image takes her back. Charlotte smiles wistfully, so focused on the father and child that she's startled when --

A sheriff's cruiser pulls up, blocking her. She jumps back.

CHARLOTTE
Hey! What the fuck...?

The driver's window rolls down. Nick stares out at her.

NICK
You should look where you're going.

CHARLOTTE
Might want to try that yourself.

She nods to a SIGN that reads PEDESTRIAN PATH: NO VEHICLES.

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)
Or do you think you're above the
law?

Nick sees the other moms are watching their exchange. He smiles and nods to them as he talks to Charlotte.

NICK
I heard your husband was released.
He staying with you?

CHARLOTTE
Of course. It's his home.

NICK
You're a very forgiving woman.

CHARLOTTE
What do you want, Nick?

NICK
Just want to make sure we won't
have any trouble. You take care.

Charlotte watches as he drives away.

INT. STATE PENITENTIARY - CAFETERIA - EVENING (FLASHBACK)

In brief glimpses: Luke busses a cart full of trays -- Alek and Ivan appear -- the GUARD at the door steps away.

Ivan blocks Luke's path -- the trays go flying as Alek SLAMS the cart into him. Luke doubles over in pain.

Ivan moves in -- but Luke rises, POUNDING his head into Ivan's nose -- Ivan reels back into the wall, bleeding.

Luke turns -- Alek SMASHES a tray into his face -- and as Luke crumbles to the floor --

INT. ALLIED SECURITY COMPANY - RESUME PRESENT

We're inside the human resources office where a giant emblem of a WARRIOR IN ARMOR adorns the wall.

Luke stares at the emblem, jarring memories flooding back.

Across the desk, the HR DIRECTOR reads his application. He reaches the end, looks up at Luke. And shakes his head.

INT. HEALTH CLUB - DAY

The SALES MANAGER is receptive, taking notes as Luke begins his pitch. But halfway through, her pen stops.

INT. BIG BOX STORE - DAY

Luke waits near the customer service line. Two WOMEN (30, 55) recognize Luke. They're so focused on him --

-- they don't notice their LITTLE BOY keeps climbing onto their cart, causing it to tip precariously. But Luke does.

LUKE

Hey, careful buddy.

YOUNGER WOMAN

What are you doing? Don't talk to my son.

LUKE

My kids used to do that too. But those carts aren't stable enough --

OLDER WOMAN

I saw you on the news. I know who you are. You shouldn't be here.

Returning, the STORE MANAGER overhears, clocks the exchange.

STORE MANAGER

Sorry, that position's been filled.

LUKE

Then I'll work the floor. Or the loading dock. I don't have a problem doing manual --

The women gloat, enjoying his groveling.

STORE MANAGER
Company policy prohibits hiring --

Suddenly the little boy JERKS BACK on the cart. Luke lunges, GRABBING him as the heavy cart TOPPLES OVER.

Startled, the little boy begins to CRY. His mother pulls him away from Luke as the Store Manager stares, stunned.

STORE MANAGER (CONT'D)
Wow. He could've been...
(beat, to Luke)
I really am sorry.

He walks away. The women and little boy follow. Off Luke as he stands there, alone in a sea of people.

INT. CHURCH BASEMENT - DAY

A circle of people on folding chairs, with coffee and pastries. The universal sign of an AA -- or Al-Anon -- meeting. Charlotte slowly twists her scarf as she shares.

CHARLOTTE
Luke started experimenting with drugs at fifteen. His father had died, he was devastated. We met during sophomore year of college. By then he was habitual. But I didn't see it. I was in love.
(beat)
I told Luke I couldn't marry him until he was clean. I saw what my dad's drinking did to my mom. When she threw him out it probably saved his life.
(beat)
Afterward, Luke was like a new man. His dad's friends pulled some strings and got him onto the force. The following year, we started a family. Luke loved everything about being a father, from midnight bottles to Little League...

Her eyes shine as she remembers. But the brightness quickly fades. The others wait patiently as she takes a deep breath.

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)
Couple years ago, I started hearing things.
(MORE)

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)

He was protecting dealers, he'd gone into business for himself. Luke said it was rumors, it would blow over. But it didn't.

(beat)

I used to be so sure. But now...

The MODERATOR leans in supportively.

MODERATOR

What are you afraid of, Charlotte?

Her eyes well. Admitting it feels like a betrayal.

CHARLOTTE

That he's not the man I thought he was.

EXT./INT. HOSPITAL - DAY

SAM (16) his leg in a cast, waits on crutches at the nurses station as Molly talks to the attending DOCTOR.

MOLLY

He's already detoxed. All I need is for someone to sign off.

DOCTOR

It's not your job to get him into rehab.

(whispers)

You busy later? Pam's out of town with the kids.

She gives him a look. I'm trying to work here.

MOLLY

If we send him home now, he'll OD in a week.

DOCTOR

You can't save everyone.

She touches his arm in an overly familiar way.

MOLLY

Maybe we could just talk to him, tell him to adjust his --

He sees a nurse watching them and pulls away.

DOCTOR

You start telling junkies how much
they can use and I'll have the D.A.
breathing down my neck.

(beat)

Discharge him, Molly. Now.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

Shay and Zoey sit on a wall near the entrance to the school.
Most of the students have left, but a few stragglers remain.

SHAY

There's no way I can spend another
summer with that bitch.

ZOEY

What are you gonna do?

SHAY

My mom says she'll take care of it.

ZOEY

And if she can't?

SHAY

God only knows what Andrea does to
keep him wrapped so tight. That
pussy must be made of gold.

Zoey giggles. But Shay's smile disappears as she sees SAM
(the boy from the hospital) waiting in the parking lot.

SHAY (CONT'D)

What's he doing here?

(beat)

He's a fucking loser, Zoe.

ZOEY

No he's not. Sam cares about me.

SHAY

Think your mom sees it that way?

INT. SHERIFF'S CRUISER - TRAVELING - DAY

Zach and Nick drive along. A call comes over the radio.

DISPATCHER

Neighbors are reporting a possible
dealer operating out of a
foreclosure on First and Elm.

Nick frowns in disgust.

NICK
High school's only a block away.

EXT/INT. FORECLOSURE PROPERTY - DAY

The windows are boarded, but heavy metal MUSIC BLARES from this dilapidated house.

Inside, a BLONDE and BRUNETTE (both 15) in tank tops and micro-shorts sit on a dirty mattress, texting.

A half-demolished wall provides an opening into the kitchen, where take-out containers are strewn everywhere. Extension cords lead out the window to neighbors' power lines.

As a COOK bags meth crystals, his partner, a scuzzy PONY-TAILED GUY covered in tats, approaches the girls with a baggy and pipe, dangling them like bait.

PONY-TAILED GUY
If you don't have enough to cover,
maybe we can work something out.

He toys with the strap on the Brunette's tank top. Repulsed, she turns away. But the Blonde stares longingly at the pipe. As Pony-Tail leans down to kiss her --

-- his head is suddenly SNAPPED BACK.

Widen to reveal Nick with a tight grip on his hair. Nick slams him into the wall, his knee in Pony-Tail's back.

The Cook tries to run, but Zach CLOTHESLINES him and he crumples to the floor.

The girls grab their stuff and go. Pony-Tail squirms.

PONY-TAILED GUY (CONT'D)
It's okay. We're with Granger.

NICK
Then you should know this area's
off-limits.
(tightening his grip)
Need me to draw you a map?

PONY-TAILED GUY
No.

Nick frisks him for weapons. Zach pats down the Cook.

But Nick doesn't cuff Pony-Tail. Instead, he turns and faces him. Pony-Tail smirks. And Nick PUNCHES him in the gut.

Pony-Tail doubles over as Zach follows Nick to the door.

NICK

I don't care if you work for
Granger. You sell to another kid in
this town and the gators'll be
snacking on your balls.

EXT. HIGHWAY/INTERSTATE REST AREA - DAY

The rest stop is deserted. Dressed in jeans and a windbreaker
GRAY (50) looks like your typical civil servant.

Luke joins him at a picnic table. Glancing around --

LUKE

I like what you've done with the
place.

GRAY

I didn't think you'd want to run
into anyone you knew.

(beat)

How are things at home?

LUKE

My son's having a hard time.

GRAY

Sorry to hear that. You look for
work yet?

LUKE

Not feeling the love there either.

GRAY

A job's required for parole.

LUKE

I'm aware of that.

GRAY

I could make some calls...

LUKE

It's okay. I've got a line on
something. We done?

Gray nods. Luke rises to go.

GRAY

Luke. There's help if you want it.
All you have to do is ask.

INT. RESTAURANT - EVENING

A LIVE BAND plays, country rock spiced with a pinch of Cajun swamp pop. Nick and Andrea are with TWO COUPLES, friends of Andrea's. The men are doughy and self-important, their wives buried under too much makeup and hairspray.

LINDSEY, a buxom blonde with a BUTTERFLY TATTOO on her forearm gestures toward Andrea's purse.

LINDSEY

Cute purse, Andy.

ANDREA

It's Prada.

She shows the triangular tag. Lindsey nods, then turns to her friend and rolls her eyes. No way is that Prada.

Nick quietly drinks his scotch, listening as Lindsey's husband BOB talks to the other man.

BOB

According to the report, one in eighty-six adults in Louisiana is incarcerated. I tell you, these private prisons are making money hand-over-fist.

NICK

How's that?

Bob turns, happy to play to a bigger audience.

BOB

They have what's called "lock-up quotas" in their contracts --

NICK

Lock-up quotas.

BOB

Incentives to keep inmates coming in. The county's in on the deal --

Suddenly hearing, Lindsey shoots her husband a look.

LINDSEY

Sweetie, didn't I tell you? Nick here's the Chief Deputy Sheriff.

Bob deflates a bit as Nick sits back, keeping an even tone.

NICK

You don't think criminals should be incarcerated?

BOB

Sure. But if they're awaiting trial, or arrested for something minor, why not give them probation, have them pay a fine?

NICK

Maybe we should just do away with prisons, release everyone. Let the public take their chances.

BOB

I didn't say that.

NICK

What is it you do...

BOB

Bob.

NICK

Bob.

BOB

Commercial real estate.

NICK

Must be stressful, putting your life on the line every day.

The others stare at Bob, who swallows hard.

NICK (CONT'D)

Stare down the wrong end of a gun, Bob. Just once. Then you can tell me how to do my fucking job.

INT. LUKE & CHARLOTTE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Luke and Charlotte get ready for bed.

CHARLOTTE

I can't believe he didn't tell me.
I have to find out he's failing
algebra from his teacher.

LUKE

He's sixteen. Most boys his age --

CHARLOTTE

It's not just the grades. He's lost
interest in everything. He used to
love planning his birthday. This
year I had to talk him into having
a party.

(beat)

It doesn't make any sense. Jackson
didn't have this hard a time when
you went in.

She stops, realizing. Luke says it for her.

LUKE

He didn't think I was guilty then.

He looks down, the weight of it hitting him.

LUKE (CONT'D)

Maybe I'm asking too much.

CHARLOTTE

What do you mean?

LUKE

I don't know. Maybe it'd be easier
if I weren't around.

CHARLOTTE

You could go? Just like that?

The ache in her voice is sharp. Luke hesitates, torn between
needing her and wanting to protect her.

He touches her cheek. And then she's in his arms, her lips
seeking his as the months of longing slip away.

INT. LUKE & CHARLOTTE'S BEDROOM - LATER

Charlotte lies curled in Luke's arms as he nuzzles her neck.

CHARLOTTE

Will you do something for me?

LUKE

I might need a few minutes.

He grins. She doesn't.

CHARLOTTE

About Jackson's party...

LUKE

You want me to skip it.

(beat)

He needs to know how much I love him, Charlotte. That I'm here for him, and always will be.

She turns, gently holding his face. Her fingers graze the scar on his neck, the ever-present reminder of the father who was taken from him. She looks into his eyes, promising.

CHARLOTTE

I'll talk to him.

EXT/INT. NICK'S CAR - TRAVELING - NIGHT

The deep blue water shimmers under the lights of the Mississippi River bridge as Nick and Andrea drive home.

ANDREA

Lindsey's so stupid. Like anyone believes those boobs are real. Don't think I didn't notice the way she was looking at you.

NICK

Darlin' why would I settle for hillbilly hooch when I can drink champagne?

He puts his hand on her thigh, pushing her dress up.

But he's distracted by a COMPLEX UNDER CONSTRUCTION along the riverfront. A rendering of the proposed property announces --

COMING SOON: BON CHANCE GAMING RESORT & SPA

NICK (CONT'D)

Bon chance. It's bonne. Fuckin' Serbs can't even spell.

ANDREA

What's that, baby?

NICK
Never mind.

There's an ACCIDENT ahead. A sedan T-boned by an 18-wheeler.

ANDREA
Holy shit.

They stop a few yards away. Inside the sedan, the DRIVER isn't moving. But a CHILD'S SCREAMS can be heard from the back as FLAMES rise from the engine.

Nick jumps out of his car.

ANDREA (CONT'D)
Nick! Shouldn't you wait for --

The TRUCK DRIVER is pinned by his airbag. GRABBING A FIRE EXTINGUISHER from a compartment behind the truck's cab, Nick SMASHES the window of the car and pulls the man and boy out.

As Nick leads them to safety, highway patrol arrives. Andrea runs to meet Nick. He turns to her, a glint in his eye, adrenaline rushing through his veins like a drug.

The sedan EXPLODES. Andrea flinches, terrified. But Nick just glances at it, then turns back to speak to the TROOPERS.

Andrea stares at him. Wondering whether her husband is brave. Or reckless as hell.

EXT. HOSPITAL - DAWN

Her night shift over, Molly heads for the parking lot.

INT. MOLLY'S CAR - TRAVELING

As she drives up to her aging home, Molly slows.

EXT. MOLLY'S HOME - DAWN

A torch-red CORVETTE CONVERTIBLE is parked in the driveway.

INT. MOLLY'S HOME - KITCHEN - DAY

She finds Zach inside, eating breakfast.

MOLLY
Is that your car?

ZACH
Isn't she a beaut?

MOLLY
Where'd you get the money?

Zach just grins.

MOLLY (CONT'D)
Jesus, Zach. Does Nick know?

ZACH
What do you think?

MOLLY
Are you fucking insane?

ZACH
Mom, ease up.

MOLLY
You can't keep it.

ZACH
Sure I can.

MOLLY
Zach, you have no idea who you're
dealing with.

ZACH
Oh, come on.

MOLLY
He's not...I never told you this,
you were too young, but Nick's not
the man you think he is.

ZACH
What do you mean?

MOLLY
When his wife found out he was
cheating on her, she started
drinking. Nick didn't care. Until
Andrea got pregnant and BethAnne
refused to give him a divorce. That
got his attention.

She pauses, not sure if she should continue.

MOLLY (CONT'D)

Nick waited 'til BethAnne picked up the kids, so he could have her arrested in front of the school, for everyone to see. Then he went to court and used the DUI to get full custody.

(beat)

That man took a woman's children away from her. What do you think he'll do to you?

INT. LUKE & CHARLOTTE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Luke flips pancakes as bacon sizzles in a cast-iron pan. Ruby adds the finishing touch to a plate of pancakes & bacon that form a funny face, writing "Happy Birthday Jackson" in icing.

RUBY

And then Maddie Redmond decided she was going to have a bowling party. Which really wasn't fair because Maddie Dirks had already sent her invitations. So Taylor told Deena and Maddie Reese that she wasn't --

LUKE

Wait a minute. How many Maddies are in your class?

RUBY

Four. So as soon as I found out Taylor and Deena weren't going, I --

Zoey comes in, smiling when she sees her dad at the stove.

ZOEY

You're making birthday breakfast.

LUKE

Can you give your sister a hand?

Charlotte carries balloons in from the garage and ties them to the back of a chair.

ZOEY

Oh, Mom, seriously? Don't you think he's a little old for that?

CHARLOTTE

You're never too old for balloons.

Hearing Jackson on the stairs, she lights the candle on his pancakes. As he enters the room, they shout --

ALL
Happy Birthday!

Ruby holds his plate out. Jackson just stands there.

JACKSON
Some of the guys are meeting at the
Waffle House. I said I'd go.

Luke stares at his son. But Jackson won't look at him.
Without waiting for permission, he leaves.

Charlotte reaches for Luke, but he moves away, crossing to
get the coffee. Ruby stares at the candle, crestfallen.

ZOEY
It's okay, Ruby. You can do it.

Ruby leans in and joylessly blows out the candle.

EXT. BATON ROUGE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - DAY

There's a bake sale going on. Tables with hand-made signs and
plates full of misshapen cookies.

And then there's Catherine DuValle's. A canopy shields the
pressed white tablecloth from the sun, protecting perfectly
frosted red velvet cupcakes and thick fudge brownies.

Catherine conducts sales as Shay and Emma package the treats.
Dylan stands nearby, watching the DASHCAM VIDEO of his father
bravely rescuing the father and son from their burning car.

Shay boxes cupcakes for a SOCCER MOM who notices the video --

SOCCER MOM
I saw your dad on the news. He's a
real hero. Not many people would
risk their lives like that.

Shay pretends she didn't hear. But Catherine beams.

CATHERINE
Oh, that's just our Nick.

As Soccer Mom smiles and moves on, Catherine scowls at Shay.

SHAY
She doesn't care about us. She's
just impressed 'cause he was on TV.

BETHANNE (O.S.)
 'Round here, that makes you a
 genuine celebrity. Guess it pays to
 leak your own dashcam video.

Suddenly tensing, Catherine turns to face BETHANNE (late
 30's, pretty but worn down).

CATHERINE
 Bethanne. What are you doing here?

SHAY
 (hugging her mom)
 I invited her.

DYLAN
 Hey Mom. What's in the bag?

She pulls Le Bron Nikes from a bag. Dylan's not impressed.

DYLAN (CONT'D)
 These are last year's. Couldn't you
 get the new ones?

BETHANNE
 Oh, honey, how silly of me. You
 want the *new* ones?
 (taking them back)
 Buy 'em yourself. I'll donate these
 to a kid who'll appreciate them.

Dylan scowls and walks away. Bethanne hands the bag to Shay.

BETHANNE (CONT'D)
 There's a pair of boots for you.

Shay gives her mom a kiss. Emma waits innocently.

EMMA
 What'd you get me?

Bethanne hesitates. Catherine smiles smugly.

BETHANNE
 Matter of fact, this had your name
 written all over it.

She hands her a box. Inside is a necklace with dangling
 letters spelling out "EMMA". Emma's eyes light up.

EMMA
 Can I keep it?

Catherine nods begrudgingly. As the kids move away --

CATHERINE

You're wasting your time, BethAnne.
There's nothing I can do.

BETHANNE

Don't sell yourself short,
Catherine.

CATHERINE

Nick's made plans for the summer.
He can't just cancel --

BETHANNE

I got a call from a reporter. She's
heard stories about Green Acres,
wants to know how things work down
there. So far I've been unable to
recall anything.

She leans in, locking eyes with Catherine.

BETHANNE (CONT'D)

But you tell Nick my memory might
improve if I don't get my kids for
the summer.

INT. GREEN ACRES PRISON - DAY

Assistant Warden Lyle pushes a hefty inmate, CHUBS, back
toward his cell. Chubs keeps stopping, seeming off-balance.

CHUBS

I need a doctor. I don't feel good.
It's my diabetes, I know it.

LYLE

Nothing wrong with you, Chubs. Skip
a few meals and you'll be fine.

CHUBS

I'm telling ya, I don't feel good.

He stops again. Lyle throws him against a wall. As Chubs
cries out, other INMATES begin to YELL from their cells.

INMATES

Leave him alone!

INMATES

Get the fuck away. He ain't
doing nothing!

Chubs throws an elbow, connects with Lyle's chin. Grabbing
him in a CHOKEHOLD, Lyle forces him to the floor. A GUARD
joins him, punching Chubs as he struggles to speak.

CHUBS
I can't breathe. I can't...

He keeps struggling. Lyle tightens his hold.

CHUBS (CONT'D)
Help me...I can't...

Finally Chubs goes limp. No longer breathing.

INT. DINER - DAY

Nick and Zach polish off deep-fried oyster po'boys dripping with rémoulade as Nick scans Porter's latest spreadsheet.

NICK
Warden up in Richland'll be pleased. The truckdriver from the other night makes four.
(off Zach's look)
Blood test confirmed. He was DUI.

His phone BUZZES. He reads the text, frowns.

ZACH
Everything okay?

NICK
Lyle found an inmate dead in his cell.

ZACH
Jesus. He hang himself?

NICK
(considers)
Could be. Sure.

He types a response, then returns to his sandwich. Zach looks at the spreadsheet, still bothered by it.

ZACH
Doesn't anybody ask why you're sending 'em so far north? There must be prisons closer by.

NICK
You telling me how to run my business?

ZACH

No. But a man in your position,
people take shots at him. You never
know who your enemies are.

NICK

Uneasy lies the head that wears a
crown, huh?

ZACH

(not understanding)
Well, yeah.

NICK

My father didn't know Shakespeare.
Born and raised with the Bible. The
meek shall inherit the earth.
Worked his ass off 'til the day he
died, nothing to show for it. The
meek don't inherit shit.

ZACH

My mom likes to say "the work is
its own reward".

NICK

Of course she does. The motto of
people who can't figure a way out
of their pathetic little lives.

(beat)

A man puts his life on the line
every day, he deserves whatever he
can get.

Two men in business suits, REED and PRAGGERT, approach.

REED

Chief Deputy DuValle, I'm Leslie
Reed, advisor to Governor Winthrop.
And this is my associate Alan --

Praggert eagerly extends his hand to Nick.

NICK

How can I help you?

REED

We've been impressed with your work
for years now. And after seeing the
news about you saving that man and
his son, well, we think it's time.

ZACH

Time for what?

REED
Time you ran for office.

PRAGGERT
(enthused)
You're smart, handsome --

NICK
Now hold on there, Alan. I'm a
married man.
(Praggert blushes)
You're awfully kind. But I have too
much respect for the governor to
run against him.

Governor? Reed and Praggert exchange a look.

REED
We were thinking more along the
lines of city council. Maybe mayor.

NICK
That's too bad. 'Cause governor's
the only office worth having.

EXT. SKATEBOARD PARK - DAY

Luke's car sits on a hill overlooking the skate park.

INT. LUKE'S CAR - SAME

Staring out the dashboard, Luke sees Zoey and Ruby shooting
baskets as TEENAGE BOYS navigate the bowls, ledges and rails
of the skate park.

Two boys crisscross the bowl, playing chicken, challenging
each other to perform increasingly dangerous stunts.

As Luke watches them, his phone RINGS.

EXT. SPORTS FIELD - DAY

Gray stands with other parents on the edge of a soccer field.

GRAY
(into phone)
You missed our appointment.

INTERCUT CONVERSATION

LUKE
Something came up.

GRAY
That's not how this works, Luke.
You have to keep me in the loop.

LUKE
Nothing to report.

EXT. SKATEBOARD PARK - SAME

Jackson helps his mother set lunch out on a table at the edge of the skate park.

CHARLOTTE
He has a right to spend time with
you, Jackson. He's your father.

JACKSON
That's biology. Doesn't mean shit.

Charlotte gives him a sharp look. He looks down, chastened.

CHARLOTTE
There are things you don't
understand about your father, what
he's been through --

RUBY
Mommy, I'm starving.

Ruby and Zoey approach. Jackson seizes the opportunity to escape back to his friends.

Charlotte starts after him, decides to let it go. She turns back to the picnic table. Something's missing.

CHARLOTTE
Damn it. The cake's in the car.

INT/EXT. LUKE'S CAR - SAME

We see the ache in Luke's eyes as he watches his family.

Deputy Mattson drives past, sees Luke's car. Luke tries to drive away but Mattson pulls a U-turn, blocking him. Luke climbs out as Mattson approaches.

MATTSON
You really are as dumb as they say.

LUKE

I didn't do anything wrong.

MATTSON

Your proximity to this park puts you in violation of your parole.

LUKE

You don't understand...

Mattson slams him against the hood of the car.

MATTSON

I suggest you shut the fuck up.

As Mattson cuffs him, Luke looks over to see --

Zoey stands beside Charlotte's car, holding the cake. Staring at her father in dismay.

INT. SHERIFF'S CRUISER - TRAVELING - NIGHT

Zach rides shotgun as Nick drives down a dark country road.

NICK

You know, having kids puts things into perspective, makes you appreciate what's important. A few years back, Dylan was writing a report about Frank and Jesse James. "Time and again those brothers were beaten and shot," he said, "but they survived. Why do you think that is?" I told him: they had the loyalty of family to sustain them.

Zach nods. Nick continues, not looking at him.

NICK (CONT'D)

Dylan's teacher insisted the James brothers were ruthless thieves and murderers. But the Civil War left the country in shambles. Men had to shield their loved ones from lawlessness, protect what was theirs. The James brothers may have traveled with fellow gunslingers, but at the end of the day, they had to rely on each other. Family was the only thing they could trust.

(beat)

(MORE)

NICK (CONT'D)

Jesse's downfall was assuming the Ford brothers were the same as him and Frank. He treated them as kin. And they rewarded him with a bullet.

He slows, turning into the parking lot for --

EXT. STRIP CLUB - CONTINUOUS

-- where Owen stands beside his Corvette.

INT. NICK'S CAR - SAME

Zach starts to sweat. Nick slowly turns and looks at him.

NICK

Did I make a mistake trusting you?

EXT. STRIP CLUB - CONTINUOUS

Delaney and Boggs roll up as Nick and Zach approach Owen.

NICK

It's Owen, right?

It takes Owen a second to realize who he's talking to.

OWEN

Yeah.

NICK

You're far from home, Owen.

Confused, Owen looks to Zach, who's silent. Nick nods to Delaney and Boggs, who pop the trunk of the Corvette.

OWEN

Hey!

Inside is a box of heroin, bagged and bundled. Delaney shakes his head. Tsk, tsk. Panicked, Owen turns to Zach.

OWEN (CONT'D)

What the fuck, Zach?

Zach gestures "stay calm". He crosses to Nick.

ZACH

Listen Nick, Owen and me, we've got a deal.

Nick ignores him as Delaney pats Owen down and comes up with a ROLL OF BILLS.

OWEN
That's my money.

NICK
See, that's where you're wrong. The proceeds from drug trafficking are forfeited to the state.

Having lost his cash, Owen nervously eyes his trunk.

NICK (CONT'D)
I have no interest in your product.

Owen exhales in relief.

NICK (CONT'D)
But I think you should understand how dangerous it'll be if you continue to conduct business in this town. Del, you know a way we can help Owen understand?

Delaney takes two FLARES from his car, hands one to Nick and the other to Zach.

ZACH
Nick, please...

NICK
Light 'em up.

Left with no choice, Zach IGNITES the flares. Eerily calm, Nick approaches Owen.

OWEN
What are you doing?

Owen backs up against his car. Stiffens as the flame moves closer and closer.

NICK
Didn't your mama ever tell you? You play with fire, you're gonna get burned.

He pauses as the heat sears Owen's cheeks. Then he tosses the flare into the trunk, nods for Zach to do the same.

OWEN
No! You motherfuc --

He lunges for Nick, but Delaney slams him back. As FLAMES rise from the Corvette, Nick calmly gets into his car. Zach follows without looking back.

Boggs stares at the flames, unnerved, until Delaney pushes him toward their car. They drive off, leaving Owen to watch helplessly as his precious car burns.

INT. BATON ROUGE SHERIFF'S OFFICE - NEXT MORNING

Charlotte waits on a bench, trying to avoid the gaze of every deputy who passes.

Mattson emerges from the back with Luke, who's seething after a sleepless night in a holding cell.

MATTSON

I let him off with a warning. Next time he won't be so lucky.

INT. CHARLOTTE'S CAR - TRAVELING - DAY

CHARLOTTE

What were you thinking? They're looking for any reason to jam you up. And you just hand it to them?

Luke can't look at her. She knows he's beating himself up, but she's too angry to let him off.

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)

You should be looking for a job, something stable to help make things normal again.

LUKE

I have been, Charlotte.

CHARLOTTE

Is that all you've been doing?

Her tone makes him look up. He eyes her for a moment. But she turns away, focusing on the road.

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)

You need to move forward. If you don't, we're not going to make it.

INT. GREEN ACRES PRISON - NICK'S OFFICE - DAY

Nick is working at his desk when Zach appears in the doorway.

ZACH

What happened with Owen...it won't happen again.

He waits, growing uneasy as Nick fails to respond. Finally --

NICK

You remind me a lot of myself at your age. But there's a process, Zach. Like wading into the Gulf. Best you mind the currents, or you'll be pulled in over your head.

Nick's cell phone RINGS. He nods for Zach to leave. Once he's gone, Nick answers, his tone playful --

NICK (CONT'D)

Hey there, darlin'.

(beat)

You poor thing. Sounds like you're in need of a night out.

INT. PRISON - CAFETERIA (FLASHBACK)

Luke works the counter as inmates move down the line. He watches Alek deliver a tray to the Older Con at a table before rejoining Ivan on line.

Suddenly a FIGHT breaks out between two inmates. Alek and Ivan move closer, anxious for an excuse to join.

The Older Con glances over as guards move in to break it up. When he turns back, a SMALL PASTRY BOX is on his tray. He slides it into his lap and opens it.

Inside is a row of bite-sized strudel. Underneath the foil are six CELL PHONES.

Returning to his station, Luke watches the Older Con take a bite of pastry and smile.

INT. SLEEK OFFICE TOWER - DOWNTOWN - RESUME PRESENT

Clean-shaven in jacket and tie, Luke rides the elevator up to the penthouse.

INT. OFFICE TOWER - PENTHOUSE SUITE - CONTINUOUS

As the doors open, security guards are waiting. Ivan and Alek, looking uncomfortable in off-the-rack suits.

LUKE

Hey guys.

They move their hands to their holsters.

LUKE (CONT'D)

He's expecting me.

They pat him down, trying hard to intimidate.

PETROVIC (O.S.)

Is that any way to treat a guest?

GORAN PETROVIC (50's) stands in the doorway to his office. The Older Con from prison. His face bears the crags and furrows of a hard life. But his suit is hand-tailored, his grooming impeccable. He waves Luke inside.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL - LOCKER ROOM - DAY

As Jackson changes out of his gym clothes, he hears TWO MALE STUDENTS talking on the other side of the lockers.

1ST STUDENT

I heard he got arrested jerking off at Clover Park.

2ND STUDENT

Must be a total perv, exposing himself to little kids.

1ST STUDENT

That's what happens when you start taking it in the ass.

Jackson slams his locker closed and turns to face MARCUS (beefy linebacker) and Dylan DuValle.

Their classmates grab their stuff. As they go --

DYLAN

Better not undress in front of him. The apple doesn't fall far.

Something in Jackson snaps. Slamming Dylan against the locker, he PUNCHES him in the face.

As Jackson pulls back to hit him again, Marcus grabs his arms, pinning them behind his back. Wiping the blood from his nose, Dylan smiles.

INT. PETROVIC'S OFFICE - DAY

Luke waits as Petrovic pours drinks. The glass wall provides a view of the sprawling office.

LUKE

Quite an operation you have.

His phone BUZZES. He sneaks a look, sees Charlotte's ID, and returns the phone to his pocket.

Petrovic gestures to an architectural model of the Bon Chance Gaming Resort & Spa. The one Nick saw on the riverfront.

PETROVIC

My new property is opening soon. Guests will expect a first class experience. I need someone who can make everything run smoothly.

LUKE

What about Ivan and Alek? I'm sure they're pretty charming when they want to be.

Petrovic smiles at Luke's sarcasm.

LUKE (CONT'D)

You know I used to be a cop.

PETROVIC

I don't care about the past.

(beat)

But I've spent years building my business. The people who work for me must be deserving of my trust.

Off Luke as he considers this.

EXT. WOODED BLUFF - NIGHT

Nick's SUV is parked on a bluff on the banks of the river.

INT. SUV - SAME

He's pressed up behind a BLONDE who could be his wife. But she's bent over the seat, her face turned away.

NICK

You're just full of surprises, aren't ya? My dirty little girl.

He thrusts harder and she moans.

NICK (CONT'D)
You like that, huh?

He grabs her breast. She reaches back to pull him closer -- and we see THE BUTTERFLY TATTOO on her forearm.

She turns her head and smiles. It's Lindsey, Andrea's friend.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Andrea leans down to snort a line of coke off the chest of someone making her just as happy. Pull back to reveal --

She's straddling Zach. He stares at her, mesmerized.

ZACH
Jesus, you're beautiful. Does he
even realize how beautiful you are?
(she smiles)
Someday I'm gonna have a wife just
as pretty as you, with a big house,
and lots of kids.

Andrea laughs, thinking he's joking. He grows defensive.

ZACH (CONT'D)
What's so funny? Happened for Nick,
why not for me, too.
(worried)
He say anything to you?

ANDREA
About what, sweetie?

She runs her fingers across his chest. He shrugs.

ZACH
Nothing. It's just...I hope he
knows he can count on me.

ANDREA
Of course he does, sugar.

She pours a bump of coke onto her breast. Zach sniffs it up like a puppy. Then he grins and climbs back on top of her.

INT. LUKE & CHARLOTTE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Luke slips into the dark room. The light comes on. Charlotte's sitting up in bed.

CHARLOTTE
Why didn't you answer your phone?
(beat)
I called three times, Luke.

LUKE
I was interviewing for a job.

CHARLOTTE
How stupid do you think I am?

LUKE
It's the truth.

She crosses to him, leaning close to check his eyes.

CHARLOTTE
Are you using?

LUKE
No. Charlotte, I would never --

CHARLOTTE
Never what? Give up? Leave?

LUKE
How many times can I say I'm sorry?
You want me to move forward. That's
what I'm trying to do.

CHARLOTTE
How am I supposed to know what to
believe? When they charged you with
trafficking, you said you were
framed, that it was all lies. Next
thing I know, you cut a deal. You
agree to a year in prison, without
even asking me --

LUKE
You think I *wanted* to go?
A trial would have buried us. It
was the only option.

He reaches out and takes her hands, trying to convince her.

LUKE (CONT'D)
We're past that now. The worst
part's over.

But she pulls away.

CHARLOTTE

Jackson was suspended. The boys at school wouldn't let up. He couldn't take it anymore.

(beat)

It's not over.

INT. HOSPITAL - EMERGENCY ROOM - DAWN

The sun is just rising as Molly sits at the ER nurses' station, sipping coffee as she fills out paperwork.

A PUDGY NURSE enters carrying a box of doughnuts.

PUDGY NURSE

Molly, I can't thank you enough for taking my shift.

MOLLY

I remember what it was like when Zach was a baby. If he got sick, I didn't sleep a wink.

PUDGY NURSE

Do you ever get past wanting to protect them from everything?

MOLLY

Honestly? No.

They share a smile as an ER NURSE hangs up the phone --

ER NURSE

Got a bus coming in. Male, twenties, possible speedball OD. Found him dumped outside a motel.

Molly and an ER DOCTOR head for the bay as PARAMEDICS pull a gurney from the back of an ambulance.

PARAMEDIC

BP's sixty over forty, shrunken pupils. Administered four milligrams Narcan. No response.

Reaching for the gurney, Molly sees the patient's face.

ER DOCTOR

Molly?

Everything goes white as Molly grips the rail. And all her years of experience fail her as she hits the ground.

TIME CUT TO:

INT. MOLLY'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - DAY

Molly slowly dresses, moving as if she's on autopilot.

INT. LUKE & CHARLOTTE'S HOUSE - UPSTAIRS HALL - DAY

Stepping from his bedroom, Luke pulls on his suit jacket. Jackson passes, his shirt collar sticking up. Luke reaches out -- and Jackson stops, lets his father fix his necktie.

Luke rests his hand on Jackson's shoulder. Wishing he could erase the bruises from his face.

INT. ZOEY'S BEDROOM - SAME

Eyes wet, Zoey stares at a black dress on the bed beside her.

Charlotte appears in the doorway, frustrated she's not ready to go. Until she sees the fear in her child's eyes. Without a word, Charlotte wraps her in her arms and holds her close.

INT. NICK'S HOUSE - MASTER BATH - DAY

The radio plays the local news as Nick and Andrea get ready at matching sinks.

Nick ties his tie and combs his hair. Like it's any other day. Ready to go, he pauses to kiss Andrea's cheek. She smiles at him in their reflection.

As soon as he leaves, her smile disappears.

INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - LOCKER ROOM - DAY

Arriving for their shift, Mattson and Boggs stow their gear and start for the door. Passing Zach's locker, they exchange a look. Then they move on.

EXT. SUBURBAN HOME - BATON ROUGE - DAY

A modest but well-tended home, an American flag flying from a post on the side of the front porch. It looks oddly familiar.

Luke's car pulls up to the curb. The family climbs out and heads up the walkway.

INT. SUBURBAN HOME - CONTINUOUS

Molly greets them at the door, her face pale from a sleepless night. She hugs Luke tightly.

As they head down the hall, we realize this is the house from the opening. Where the wake of the fallen officer was held.

Family photos line the walls, showing a young Catherine and her husband Daniel DuValle. With their daughter and two sons.

Luke enters the living room and sees Catherine. For a moment they just stand there, eyeing each other. Then he steps forward and gives her an obligatory kiss on the cheek.

LUKE

Hi mom.

CATHERINE

Luke.

(beat)

Hello, Charlotte.

Charlotte matches her mother-in-law's cool tone.

CHARLOTTE

Catherine.

Catherine nods, obviously uncomfortable as she looks at the kids. Ruby is the only one who moves in to give her a hug.

RUBY

Hi Grandma.

Catherine seems surprised, then pats the child's head.

CATHERINE

You're all getting so big.

LUKE

Well, it's been a while since you've seen them.

NICK (O.S.)

Whose fault is that, Luke?

Luke turns to see Nick. Andrea and the kids wait behind him. As the brothers face each other their hatred is palpable.

MOLLY
Don't start, Nick.

Nick raises a hand, dismissing her concern. He hugs her. Molly stiffens but accepts his embrace.

NICK
You need anything?

She shakes her head, then turns to the kids.

MOLLY
There are sandwiches and cookies in the kitchen.

Zoey and Shay lead Ruby and Emma away. Dylan and Jackson remain, staring daggers at each other. Charlotte clocks the exchange. She turns to Luke --

CHARLOTTE
Maybe we should go.

CATHERINE
Maybe you should.

MOLLY
It's not up to you, Mother.

Taking Luke's arm, she leads him over to an easel displaying a photo of ZACH IN UNIFORM. She squeezes his hand.

MOLLY (CONT'D)
I didn't want to. Mom insisted.

As she moves off to greet another guest, Luke stares at the easel. But instead of Zach's photo, he sees his father's from twenty-five years ago. Memories come flooding back --

-- SHOTS ring out, GLASS SHATTERS

-- LUKE TURNS as DANIEL FALLS

-- LOTTERY TICKETS float to the floor

RESUME PRESENT as Nick's voice breaks through Luke's reverie.

NICK (O.S.)
Some people are too fucking stupid to live.

He stares at Zach's photo, shaking his head.

LUKE
I thought he was your partner.

NICK

Trainee. Zach may have been my nephew, but if I'd known he was using I never would have hired him.

(lowering his voice)

I told Mattson to cut you loose. But if you start working for Petrovic, there's nothing I can do. (off Luke's surprise)

This is my town. Think there's anything I don't know about?

LUKE

I'm clean, Nick. I have a wife and family to think about.

NICK

So did Dad. Didn't stop him. You want to fuck up again, go ahead. But time comes, I gotta do my job.

INT. BAR - NIGHT

The place is crowded. Luke's at the bar, drinking a Scotch. Someone appears behind him. But Luke looks straight ahead.

LUKE

I'm in. Just tell me what to do.

In the mirror over the bar, we see Goran Petrovic. He silently moves on as Luke finishes his drink.

EXT. HIGHWAY/INTERSTATE REST AREA - NIGHT

Gray's car sits in the deserted rest stop. Through the windshield we see Luke in the passenger seat, talking to him. But now Gray's cleaned up, dressed in a dark suit. Looking like another kind of government agent.

INT. GRAY'S CAR - SAME

As Luke finishes, Gray stares at him.

GRAY

This isn't what we agreed on.

LUKE

I realize that, but Gray --

GRAY

You don't honestly think I can approve something like this.

LUKE

It's the only way to get close enough to him. What we've gotten over the past year is shit compared to what I can learn from inside his operation.

GRAY

Luke, I've never known anyone willing to put so much on the line. And the agency appreciates everything you've done.

(beat)

But what you're proposing...we just can't take that chance.

But Luke is unwavering.

LUKE

I didn't spend a year inside just to build a case for you. Goran Petrovic murdered my father, and I intend to prove it. So the DEA can either get onboard or get the fuck out of the way. 'Cause as far as I'm concerned, you're just along for the ride.

END OF SHOW